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ALFALFA PRODUCTION  
Washington County, Oregon

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I. Objective and the Problem

To maintain volume of whole-milk production for Portland, Oregon market during dry summer season.

II. Extension Worker's job

To teach 500 dairy commercial farmers how to grow alfalfa for summer feed.

III. The Situation

In the Willamette Valley, where Washington County is located, there is a long, dry summer season. If the farmers were to maintain their volume of milk production to meet the demands of the Portland market they had to supplement their pasture with bought feeds. This turned out to be a costly procedure. They were looking about for some crop that would provide green pasture and soiling feed during the dry summer season. The county agent realized that alfalfa would furnish green feed for soiling and pasture during the dry season, would utilize the available subsoil moisture, and would yield nearly as much in dry years as in wet years. If the rain injured one harvesting of alfalfa another came on in a few weeks, thus insuring an adequate hay supply in spite of weather hazards.

IV The People

The people who settled in Washington County and in the Willamette Valley were mostly native-born Americans but had migrated from other parts of the United States to Oregon. They transferred many agricultural practices with them. One of these migrants came from Kansas. In 1920 when the county agent was looking around to find a person who was growing alfalfa successfully in his county he located this Kansas farmer.

V. Solution

With this man as a demonstrator the county agent obtained the cooperation of other farmers to test out the production of alfalfa on a small scale on their farms. These tests proved so successful that by 1923 the county agent and agronomy specialist became sufficiently convinced to ask a number of farmers to grow alfalfa as demonstrations. In connection with these demonstrations a number of points were to be observed, among which were:

- (1) What variety of alfalfa grew best under Washington County conditions.
- (2) Whether they had to inoculate these seed and use lime.
- (3) What soil preparation was necessary.
- (4) What cultivation to give alfalfa after it had begun to grow.

VI. Extension's and Related Programs

The county farm and home economics conference held in the fall of 1923 brought out the significance of alfalfa production to dairy farms. During 1924 the county agent and the agronomy specialist selected 35 out of 121 alfalfa demonstrations to determine what methods of alfalfa production were most successful under Washington County conditions. With this information as a background the county agent held a series of alfalfa meetings, tours, issued a few circular letters, and discussed production of



alfalfa through news notes in the local press. In cooperation with the subject-matter specialist the county agent wrote a bulletin on alfalfa production under Washington County conditions. He had also built up a list of dairymen to whom he distributed all his material on alfalfa. To carry out his programs he felt it necessary to have the orders for alfalfa seed pooled in his office. He learned alfalfa seed would grow successfully under Washington County conditions only if it came from one limited source. He also saw to it that the dealers had on hand inoculation material and lime. He held a tour for businessmen, to acquaint them with alfalfa production and to convince the dealers of the idea that there were only limited areas from which seed could be obtained that would grow successfully under Washington County conditions. These tours resulted in effectively supplementing the spread of alfalfa production due to the county agent's efforts. By 1927, there were only a few communities in the county where alfalfa was not established. By 1930 all the communities were producing alfalfa successfully. The acreage changed but little; old acreages were ploughed up and new acreages planted without much increase in the total. The increase in alfalfa production had the effect of increasing the summer milk production and more nearly meeting the demand on the Portland Market for fluid milk.

#### VII. Results

The follow-up resulted in alfalfa becoming a permanent or successful system of dairy farming in Washington County. Not only was the county agent able to demonstrate to the dairy farmer that alfalfa production was possible under Washington County conditions but he demonstrated it to other county agents to the extent that alfalfa became a prominent crop on dairy farms in the surrounding counties. This is shown by the following table.

Counties	1940		1935		1930		1920
	Farms reptg.	Acres	Farms reptg.	Acres	Farms reptg.	Acres	Farms Acres
Benton.....	214	2997	296	3617	91	1032	55
Linn.....	546	5289	422	3961	123	710	260
Marion.....	585	3965	373	2846	139	1061	398
Polk.....	315	3434	336	2717	118	636	124
Washington..	660	3549	804	3699	742	3054	22
Yamhill.....	552	4160	474	3505	202	1231	427

#### VIII. Significance of the case - Factors Limiting Success:

- (1) None of the farmers had any experience in growing alfalfa.
- (2) Difficulty of dealers in providing the right kind of material, such as seed, inoculation.



Factors Contributing to Success:

- (1) The problem was serious and solution practical.
- (2) The effective use of a demonstration to prove a new crop to other dairy farmers.
- (3) Writing and distributing a bulletin on alfalfa production under Washington County conditions.
- (4) The use of a wide range of extension devices such as circular letters, tours, and meetings.
- (5) The information to dealers on requirements necessary for successful alfalfa production under Washington County conditions.



